

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAB-02
/058 W

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R 092059Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6891
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 2455

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PN, VE
SUBJECT: TORRIJOS TRIP TO VENEZUELA-
DOMESTIC TEMPEST IN TEAPOT

REF: PANAMA 1625, CARACAS 2266 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: TORRIJOS' MARCH 3-4 VISIT TO CARACAS TO
BRIEF PRESIDENT PEREZ ON STATUS OF CANAL NEGOTIATIONS
HAS CAUSED MINOR DOMESTIC TEMPEST IN TEAPOT. ESSENCE
OF SQUABBLE INVOLVES LONG-STANDING COPEI FEARS THAT AD
IS PLAYING UP TO MAS PARTY TO COPEI'S OWN DETRIMENT AS
SECOND MAJOR PARTY, CRITICISM OF PEREZ' PERSONAL
DIPLOMATIC STYLE, AS WELL AS REACTION TO
VENEZUELAN-CUBAN RELATIONS. IT DOES NOT REFLECT BASIC
DIVERGENCE OVER STAND ON CANAL ISSUE. END SUMMARY

2. UPON DEPARTURE MARCH 4 AFTER ONE-DAY VISIT TO
CARACAS, GENERAL TORRIJOS TOLD PRESS THAT HE AND
PRESIDENT PEREZ HAD FULLY DISCUSSED STATUS OF CANAL
NEGOTIATIONS, BUT THAT HE COULD NOT ELABORATE ON
DETAILS BECAUSE OF COMMITMENT TO MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIAL
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NATURE OF NEGOTIATIONS.

3. IN RESPONSE TO REPORTER'S QUESTION, TORRIJOS SAID
THAT NEW YORK TIMES' ALLEGATIONS ABOUT PRESIDENT PEREZ
RECEIVING CIA MONIES "COULD BE AN INDICATION THAT
ACTIVITIES INVOLVING FORCE MAY TAKE PLACE LATER."
TORRIJOS ALSO MET FOR HAL HOUR MORNING OF MARCH 4 WITH DEPUTY

JOSE VICENTE RANGEL, PRESIDENTIAL ASPIRANT OF THE MARXIST MAS (MOVEMENT TOWARD SOCIALIST) PARTY. ON MARCH 6, THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY (COPEI) NATIONAL COMMITTEE ISSUED A HARSH STATEMENT CONDEMNING "EXECUTIVE DIPLOMACY" WHICH UNDERMINES THE FOREIGN MINISTRY'S ROLE AND EXPRESSING DISMAY AND SURPRISE AT RANGEL'S PRESENCE AT THE MEETING. COPEI DEMANDED AN EXPLANATION FOR THESE "INCREDIBLE DEVELOPMENTS." MOREOVER, COPEI ASKED RHETORICALLY IF THERE WAS A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RANGEL'S RECENT VISIT TO CUBA AND HIS MEETING WITH TORRIJOS, SPECULATED ON CLOSER PANAMANIAN-CUBAN TIES, CALLED TORRIJOS A DICTATOR, AND DECRIED TORRIJOS' STATEMENT ABOUT POSSIBLE THREAT

OF USE OF FORCE AS VERY SERIOUS, A "SHAMELESS INTERVENTION" IN VENEZUELAN INTERNAL AFFAIRS.

4. RANGEL, IN REPLY TO COPEI BROADSIDE, LAUNCHED ONE OF HIS OWN, STATING MARCH 7 THAT COPEI HAD "LOST ITS HEAD" AND WAS AVOIDING THE CENTRAL ISSUE--WHICH IS SUPPORT FOR PANAMA IN ITS STRUGGLE TO ACHIEVE FULL SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE CANAL. RANGEL NOTED THAT HE HAD BEEN INVITED PERSONALLY BY TORRIJOS TO MEET WITH HIM AT PRESIDENT PEREZ' SEASIDE RETREAT AND THAT THERE WAS NO RELATION BETWEEN PEREZ' AND TORRIJOS' CONVERSATION AND HIS OWN SEPARATE EXCHANGE WITH TORRIJOS.

5. GOV INFORMATION MINISTER DIEGO ARRIA MARCH 8
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DENIED CATEGORICALLY THAT TORRIJOS HAD INTERFERED IN VENEZUELAN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, SAYING THAT TORRIJOS' STATEMENT WAS A SIGN OF FRIENDSHIP FOR VENEZUELA AND OF SUPPORT FOR PEREZ.

6. COMMENT: COPEI'S STRIDENT REACTION TO TORRIJOS' VISIT REFLECTS A NUMBER OF ITS SENSITIVITIES. COPEI CLEARLY FELT CONCERNED BY THE FACT THAT RANGEL WAS INVITED TO MEET WITH TORRIJOS AT PRESIDENTIAL RESORT. COPEI BOTH PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY EXPRESSED ITS LONG-STANDING PERCEPTION THAT AD LEADERS ARE FOLLOWING STRATEGY OF PLAYING UP MAS TO DETRIMENT OF COPEI AS TRADITIONAL SECOND MAJOR PARTY. FURTHER, NATURE OF PEREZ-TORRIJOS MEETING REFLECTS GENUINE COPEI CONCERN ABOUT PEREZ' GO-IT-ALONE FOREIGN POLICY STYLE WHICH OFTEN LEAVES THE FOREIGN MINISTRY TO PLAY SECOND FIDDLE AT BEST, NOT TO MENTION LOWER HOUSE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE HEADED BY COPEI STALWART RODRIGUEZ ITURBE. COPEI IS ALSO WATCHFUL ABOUT EXCESSIVE VENEZUELAN RAPPROCHEMENT WITH CUBA.

FROM GOV POINT OF VIEW, HOWEVER, ADVERSE PUBLICITY HAS PROBABLY REBOUNDED TO ITS FAVOR, SINCE PEREZ DEMONSTRATED ONCE AGAIN NOT ONLY VENEZUELAN SOLIDARITY ON CANAL ISSUE, BUT PEREZ' BOLIVARIAN BROKER ROLE IN HEMISPHERE AFFAIRS. IN ADDITION, RANGEL'S INVOLVEMENT WAS PROBABLY A PLUS FOR AD SINCE BOTH NATIONALISTS AND LEFTISTS COULD SUPPORT HIS PRESENCE. FROM POINT OF VIEW OF VENEZUELAN INTERNAL POLITICS, IT WAS FAR MORE PALATABLE FOR TORRIJOS AND RANGEL TO MEET IN PEREZ' OWN HOUSE THAN ELSEWHERE.

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Sent Date: 09-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
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Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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